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Design the future: SPIE/National Academies forum will gather comments on how to strengthen photonics industry

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BELLINGHAM, Washington, USA -- The photonics R&D community has the opportunity to have a say in the direction of a new study aimed at strengthening the industry, via an open forum at [SPIE Photonics West](#) in San Francisco this month.

Erik Svedberg, Senior Program Officer with the U.S. National Academies, and Eugene Arthurs, SPIE CEO, will moderate the "Future of Photonics" panel to gather industry input for an updated version of the 1998 report *Harnessing Light*, produced by the National Academies and its operating arm, the National Research Council.

"Much has happened since the original *Harnessing Light* study was published in 1998," Svedberg said. "Revisiting the technology and policy issues today would be quite timely. The new report has the possibility to address the role photonics plays in national competitiveness and innovation."

Among the issues, Svedberg said, the study committee will need to consider the infusion of photonics-related technologies into mass-market applications, and how to economically and appropriately harness the necessary multifunctional manufacturing capabilities.

"The new study can also identify national strengths and weaknesses in relation to current and future needs including economic impact, workforce needs, and future research directions," he said. "It would consider the technology areas where optics is an enabler that can dramatically impact the economy of the country."

The finished study would be used to inform industry plans and government policy by providing a unique community view of the future directions for photonics science and technology and for market trends.

Along with SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics, a new *Harnessing Light* study is being supported by the IEEE Photonics Society and the Optical Society (OSA).

The "[Future of Photonics](#)" forum will be held 27 January, 8:45 to 9:30 a.m. at the Moscone Center. There is no charge, but attendees must obtain entry badges at the Photonics West registration desk. More information is available online [in the conference program](#).

"While the original *Harnessing Light* report has been extremely useful to academic, industrial, and governmental organizations throughout the world, in the past ten years, enormous progress has been made in photonics sciences and technologies," Arthurs said.

He noted that, "irrespective of the economic conditions, optical science and engineering is headed toward another strong growth period, driven by developments in advanced materials, solid state lighting, solar technologies, sensors, lasers, imaging, fiber-optic communications, digital photography, diagnostic medicine, computing/processing, and consumer displays and TVs."

The new *Harnessing Light* committee will:

- Review updates in the state of the science that have taken place since publication of the 1998 study.
- Identify the technological opportunities that have arisen from recent advances in and potential applications of optical science and

engineering

- Assess the current state of optical science and engineering in the United States and abroad, including trends in private and public research, market needs, and examples of translating progress in photonics innovation into competitiveness advantage (including activities by small businesses), workforce needs, manufacturing infrastructure, and the impact of photonics on the national economy.
- Prioritize a set of research grand-challenge questions to fill identified technological gaps in pursuit of national needs and national competitiveness.
- Recommend actions for the development and maintenance of global leadership in the photonics driven industry--including both near-term and long-range goals, likely participants, and responsible agents of change.

Similar recent studies focus on photonics industry status, challenges, and conditions in Canada, Germany, the European Union, Scotland, the United Kingdom, and Japan.

[SPIE](#), the international society for optics and photonics, was founded in 1955 to advance light-based technologies. Serving more than 180,000 constituents from 168 countries, the Society advances emerging technologies through interdisciplinary information exchange, continuing education, publications, patent precedent and career and professional growth. SPIE annually organizes and sponsors approximately 25 major technical forums, exhibitions and education programs in North America, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific, and supports scholarships, grants and other education programs around the world.

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